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ABSTRACT

This handbook is designed to serve as a guide for community colleges as they plan distance learning programs. Produced by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, it provides member institutions with guidelines and policies that will be considered in the evaluation of distance education. Eleven current accreditation concerns are identified: (1) institutional motivation; (2) partnerships; (3) mission, educational programs, and the curriculum; (4) faculty; (5) students; (6) library and learning resources; (7) institutional effectiveness and student outcomes; (8) organization, planing, and human resources; (9) facilities and equipment; (10) catalogs and publications; and (11) intellectual property rights. The handbook includes six major sections: substantive change policy; substantive change reports; policy statement on accreditation and authorization of distance learning through telecommunications; principles of good practice for electronically delivered degree and certificate programs in the areas of curriculum and instruction, institutional context and commitment, and evaluation and assessment; guidelines for distance education; and accreditation standards. (Contains 10 references.) (RDG)

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1999 Distance Education Handbook

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1999 Distance Education Handbook

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A BRIEF HISTORY

Though distance learning is thought by some to be significantly changing American higher education, it is not a new phenomenon. Its predecessors are the correspondence courses that have spanned this century, providing education for those learners who could not pursue a traditional education. Yesterday's correspondence courses depended on written materials transmitted between teacher and learner by mail; today's distance education courses depend on the multitude of constantly changing communication technologies that can transmit instruction and relay materials between learner and teacher.

These technologies have taken shape at a mind-boggling pace, erasing traditional barriers of time, space, and place and represent the capacity to fundamentally change the paradigm for transmitting knowledge and skills from master to learner. For reasons of access, economy, effectiveness, and convenience, distance learning is sweeping higher education and, in the view of some, changing the role of the academy from a cloistered retreat to a marketplace that some institutions would prefer not to enter. Whether one is a zealot for or against distance learning, one cannot escape its impact.

Nearly half of the college students in this country are of the age group once thought of as nontraditional. They are adults, 80% of whom work full-time, and they are primarily coming to college for many reasons, including economic advancement, accomplishment of educational degree goals, and personal enrichment. Many of these students are attracted by the convenience and flexibility of distance education programs--a perfect fit for their busy lives. They are not alone, however; the evidence indicates that many students of a more "traditional" age find distance learning attractive and that the population in Americans seeking postsecondary education is growing faster than the nation's ability to meet the demand.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Since the accrediting process serves to validate an institution's commitment to quality assurance and continuous improvement, the purpose of this publication is to provide some assistance to member institutions as they plan distance learning programs. Because these programs will undergo the same scrutiny employed in the evaluation of conventional campus-based programs, the contextual frame of reference is provided by the Commission's Standards for Accreditation and Commission Policies.

SOME CURRENT ACCREDITATION CONCERNS

Motivation: The institution should examine closely its motivation for doing distance education, since the driving forces behind this effort are many-- the potential for increasing enrollment, public pressure, reducing cost, grant monies, opportunities for faculty to be creative, notions that everybody-is-doing-it, and many more. Lack of an identified need for distance learning, whether real or perceived, can influence achievement of institutional understanding of the motives for

doing distance education. Understanding institutional motives can drive institutional commitment to the program, an essential matter if students are to be ensured the opportunity to complete educational goals in such a program.

Partnerships: As an institutions develop programs in distance learning, it might seek to create partnerships with other entities. When contemplating such partnerships, the institution will want to preserve institutional integrity---the quality of instruction, academic rigor, educational effectiveness, and the normal level of control of curriculum development and other aspects of the educational enterprise.

Mission, educational programs, and the curriculum: Distance learning should remain consistent with and central to the stated mission of the institution. The educational policies of the institution regarding distance learning programs should be clearly stated and the distance learning curriculum should demonstrate appropriate rigor and breadth if degrees or certificates are awarded. When course materials are developed outside the institution, the academic quality of those materials should be assessed via the institution's review policies. Academic standards for all courses and programs should be the same as for all other educational experiences delivered by the institution. Students should be able to move easily from the distance education curriculum to other curricula of the college.

Faculty: Some faculty members will be more interested in distance education than others, and most faculty who engage it will require ongoing training. Because technological currency is important, the level of support for staff development is one indicator of institutional commitment to distance learning. Policies regarding faculty loads, class size, time allowed for course development, and compensation need to be appropriate for the context of distance learning. Faculty access to appropriate technology and software as well as to support personnel is critical to a successful program. On-going evaluation of faculty involved in distance learning should include appropriate recognition all scholarly activities.

Students: The overriding concern for students is that the delivery of instruction be in modes appropriate for the specific content of a course. Students should expect that distance learning programs will permit completion of educational outcomes and objectives in the same manner as those delivered in traditional programs. The academic and technical skills (as well as the commitment) required to successfully complete such a program should be made clear to students, and since a distance learning environment requires certain skills and competencies to succeed, the institution should have the means to assess whether students have them. Proper training should be available for students in working independently and in utilizing the necessary technology. Access to student services such as admissions, orientation, financial aid, registration, advisement, tutoring, and other appropriate student services and technical support should be made available. Student access to faculty should also be a major program ingredient and issues about the evaluation of student work should be addressed.

Access for learning or physically challenged students may pose some special concerns since these students frequently avail themselves of distance learning. These students often will indicate that they would not be likely to be taking courses at all were it not for the availability of such an

education. The college may need to consider special services or additional equipment for these students.

Library and learning resources: Availability and use of appropriate, equivalent, (and sometimes personalized) learning resources are essentials of a supportive and successful distance learning program. Although many of today's institutional libraries are technologically capable of supporting learners at a distance, orientation and training are important components of effective student use of all resources for learning. Special funding may be necessary.

Institutional effectiveness and student outcomes: Although the Commission does not endorse a specific assessment model, providing evidence of institutional effectiveness will require that the institution develop distance learning outcome and assessment strategies. Such strategies should take into account how distance learning programs compare with more traditional programs in such areas as transferability, observable and measurable learning outcomes, eligibility for financial aid, student satisfaction, and other program goals. Review and approval processes should be in place and used to ensure appropriateness of goals and objectives, as well as the effectiveness of distance learning.

Organization, planning, human resources: The college community must understand the connection between the distance learning program and the institutional mission and share the reasons for the program's development. The college should demonstrate commitment to financial and technical support that allows a program to continue for a period of time sufficient for students to complete educational objectives. Those involved with the administration of such programs should provide an appropriate infrastructure and possess skills appropriate to such an endeavor--especially technological proficiency and the ability to communicate with all constituencies. Planning for the fiscal, technical, and human resources needed to deliver such a program must be thorough and continuous and provide for evaluation on an on-going basis. Evaluation should focus on the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the institution's distance learning program, as well as on assessment of student learning, retention, and satisfaction. The institution should also demonstrate preparedness to deal with such problems as computer viruses, hackers, computer crime, etc.

Facilities and equipment: In integrating a distance learning program into the institution's mission, planning for technology-enhanced facilities and equipment appropriate to meeting program or course objectives must be part of long range planning and budgeting activities. The technology should support the program's design, and planning for obsolescence should be evident. Expenditure patterns should demonstrate commitment to providing the resources necessary to ensure success and effectiveness, as well as continuity and integrity of the program.

Catalogs and publications: As an official document of the institution, the catalog should clearly describe the distance learning program. Complete, timely, and accurate description of instructional delivery could also be presented in the catalog or in supplemental publications. If prerequisites for participation or other program requirements exist, these should be clearly stated, as should expected learning outcomes and the nature of the faculty/student interaction. Transferability of credit should be addressed in a forthright manner, as should matters regarding fees.

Intellectual property rights: The preparation of distance learning instructional materials differs from the preparation of materials for the traditional classroom setting, raising questions about ownership, copyright, and fair use. Faculty and administrative personnel will need to develop policies that do not undermine faculty rights or the learning/teaching process and that addresses issues of copyright, ownership, and faculty compensation.

ACCJC STANDARDS AND POLICIES

ACCJC POLICIES

The Standards and Policies of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges describe good practice in community and junior college education and are the criteria by which an institution can assess its effectiveness in achieving its stated purposes. The standards and policies attempt to address every aspect of institutional operations. In these standards and policies there are specific criteria that inform institutional assessment of distance learning. These specific items are noted below.

I. SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE POLICY

NOTE: This policy is currently under review by the Commission

The development of distance education programs may represent a substantive change---"a change which alters the objectives or the scope of the institution, modifies the nature of the constituencies it seeks to serve, or changes the geographic area served. "Such changes are subject to Commission review and require that the institution notify the Commission in advance of program initiation by filing a Substantive Change Report. The policy, cited below, describes the intent, processes, and procedures of this policy. It can also be found in the 1996 Edition of the Handbook of Accreditation and Policy Manual, pp.102 ff.

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

(Adopted October 1972, Revised January 1978, June 1991, June 1996, October 1997)

Introduction

The accreditation of an institution is in part an affirmation that the institution has established conditions and procedures under which its mission and goals can be realized and that it appears in fact to be accomplishing them. Accreditation rests on the integrity with which institutions conduct their educational endeavors and the orderly procedures they have established for insuring the quality of those endeavors. When an institution is accredited, or its accreditation is reaffirmed, it is accredited for conditions existing at the time of that action by the Commission.

Because institutions are in continual processes of change, the Commission requires that all institutions be reevaluated periodically.

Most changes, such as adding or dropping courses, developing new concentrations that are allied with existing offerings, and changing personnel, are not substantive and fall within the nature and scope of the institution as it was last evaluated. Special programs, off-campus educational activities, or new degree levels may extend learning opportunities to a variety of populations, some otherwise not served. The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges seeks neither to inhibit such activities nor to diminish creative approaches to them. Sometimes, however, an institution plans a change between evaluations which is a substantive change; that is, a change which alters the objectives or the scope of the institution; modifies the nature of the constituencies it seeks to serve; or changes the geographic area(s) served.

While the decision to modify an institution is an institutional prerogative and responsibility, the Commission is obligated to determine the effect of the substantive change on the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the total institution. Substantive changes in an institution are subject to review by the Commission both prior to and subsequent to implementation. Substantive changes are not automatically covered by the institution's accreditation or candidate status, and may precipitate a review of the accredited status of the institution. A principle of institutional accreditation is that everything done in the name of the institution is covered by its accreditation. Conversely, anything done without appropriate concern for consistency with an institution's stated mission and concern for quality and integrity threatens the accredited status of the entire institution.

Notification

An institution considering a substantive change is urged to contact the Commission staff early in its deliberations. Early notification enables the staff to provide information and advice about the effect of the proposed change on the accreditation or candidate status of the institution. Institutions proposing substantive changes should send a letter to the Commission describing the proposed change, the need for the change, and the anticipated effects. Commission staff will review the proposal to determine whether or not it is indeed substantive. Size, complexity, maturity, and experience of the institution are important factors. What might be a minor change for one institution may well be viewed as a major change for another institution.

Commission action

If the Commission staff determines that the proposed change is substantive in nature, the institution will be asked to submit a more detailed statement for review by the Commission's Committee on Substantive Change. The Committee may approve the change or refer the change to the Commission for action at either the January or June meeting. For purposes of meeting federal recognition requirements with which the Commission must comply, the Substantive Change Report is the business plan for the establishment of a branch campus. The Substantive Change Report should include the following:

1. A concise statement of the proposed change and the reasons for it. If the substantive change involves educational programs, the report should include a description of the educational program(s) to be offered. The statement should include a description of the planning process which led to the request for the change, how the change relates to the institution's stated mission, and the assessment of needs and resources which has taken place.

2. Evidence that the institution has any necessary internal or external approvals. The statement should state clearly what faculty, administrative, governing board, or regulatory agency approvals are needed and evidence that any legal requirements have been met.

3. Evidence that the educational purposes of the change are clear and appropriate. Institutions should provide evidence that all accreditation standards are fulfilled by the change and that all relevant Commission policies are addressed.

4. An analysis of the anticipated effect of the proposed change on the rest of the institution. The institution should address whether or not the proposed change will have an effect on the ability of the institution to continue to be able to meet the Eligibility Requirements, and, therefore, continued accreditation status.

5. Evidence that the institution has provided adequate human, management, financial, and physical resources and processes to initiate, maintain, and monitor the change and to assure that the activities undertaken are accomplished with acceptable quality. Private institutions must include projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow at a branch campus. In keeping with the financial reporting requirements of their district, system, or governmental agency, public institutions must include financial information which allows for comparable analysis of the financial planning and management of a branch campus.

6. Other information requested by Commission staff that is pertinent to the specific nature of the change.

A candidate or accredited institution is expected to complete this process sufficiently in advance of a substantive change to permit approval before the change is instituted. In the event that the change is judged to be of such magnitude as to potentially affect the accredited status of the institution, the review process may be expanded to include a review of the accreditation of the institution.

Substantive changes which are approved by the Commission should be included in the next institutional self study and will be included as part of the next periodic review of the institution. If the institution is not due for a comprehensive evaluation within two years of the approval of the substantive change, an on-site evaluation, or such other measures as the Commission may determine, may be required. Costs for an on-site evaluation will be borne by the institution. (Note: Certain off-campus centers, including branch campuses, are subject to an on-site inspection within the first six months of establishment.)

EXAMPLES OF SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

A substantive change in a candidate or accredited institution is one which may significantly affect its nature, quality, objectives, scope or control. Examples of substantive changes subject to prior review and approval by the Commission include:

1. Changing an institution's private or public character, including changes in the denominational character of a religiously-affiliated institution.

2. Changing sponsorship or form of control, including change of ownership of a proprietary institution.

3. Merging with another institution.

4. Offering courses or programs outside the geographic region served by the institution at the time of the previous evaluation, or outside the WASC region, including international sites.

5. Move to a new location or establishment of major off-campus units.

6. Offering programs at a degree level different from that listed for the institution in the WASC Directory. (An institution planning to offer the baccalaureate degree will fall under the jurisdiction of the WASC Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities, requiring accreditation by that Commission. Consultation with Commission staff should begin early in the planning process.)

7. Contracting with a non-regionally accredited organization for the organization to provide courses or programs on behalf of the candidate or accredited institution.

8. Change in educational purposes and/or **courses or** programs **that represent a significant departure, in terms of either the content or method of delivery from those** operative at the time of the most recent evaluation, including changes in constituencies or clientele.

II. SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE REPORTS

The following format for reporting a Substantive Change can be found in the Guide to Institutional Self Study & Reports to the Commission, 1997 Edition, pp. 41-42 and on the Web Site. A substantive change in an accredited institution is a change that significantly affects the nature of the institution, it quality, its objectives and educational programs, its scope, its control, or the allocation of its resources. Examples of substantive changes include, but are not limited to the following:

- Changes in an institution's private or public character
- Changes in form of control of the institution, including change of ownership or merger
- Offering programs at a more advanced level
- A move to a new location
- Establishment of major off-campus or international units
- Programs offered for the institution by non-regionally accredited organizations

- Changes in purposes and/educational objectives operative at the most recent comprehensive evaluation

An institution considering a substantive change or unsure if a contemplated action constitutes a substantive change should refer to the policy statements in the Handbook of Accreditation and Policy Manual, 1996 Edition and consult with the Commission through the Executive Director. Colleges should be aware that substantive change may involve a review of the accredited status of the institution by the Commission as well as a site visit.

Format and Content

1. Cover Sheet. The cover sheet includes the date of submission, name and address of the institution, and the title, **Substantive Change Report**.

2. Table of Contents.

3. Analysis of the Proposed Change.

1. The College should formulate a concise statement of the proposed change and the reasons for it. The statement should include a description of the planning process leading to the request for the change, how the change relates to the institution's stated mission, and the assessment of needs and resources which has taken place.

2. The statement should include evidence that the institution has any necessary internal or external approvals. The statement should state clearly what faculty, administrative, governing board or regulatory agency approvals are needed and provide evidence that any legal requirements have been met.

3. Evidence that the educational purposes of the change are clear and appropriate should be provided. Institutions should also include evidence that all accreditation standards are fulfilled by the change and that all Commission policies are addressed. Where appropriate, consult the Commission policies relating to:

Contractual Relationships with Non-Regionally Accredited Organizations

Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals

Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Delivered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs

4. The College should provide an analysis of the anticipated effect of the proposed change on the rest of the institution. The institution should address whether or not the proposed change will have an effect on the ability of the institution to continue to be able to meet the criteria for eligibility, and therefore, continued accreditation status.

5. Evidence that the institution has provided adequate human, financial, and physical resources and processes to initiate, maintain, and monitor the change and to assure that the activities undertaken are accomplished with acceptable quality should be provided.
Depending on the nature of the change, the Commission may require more detailed information. The institution should consult with the Executive Director to determine what further, if any, information is needed.

V. POLICY STATEMENT ON ACCREDITATION AND AUTHORIZATION OF DISTANCE LEARNING THROUGH TELECOMMUNICATIONS

This policy represents one of the earlier efforts on the part of accreditors to develop principles and procedures that would address issues in distance learning. It was reviewed by the Commission in 1996 and continues to be in effect. The policy can be found in the Handbook on pages 68-73.

Introduction

This Statement summarizes the results of a two year study on assessing long distance learning by telecommunications. The study, co-sponsored by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, focused on the rapid development and use of telecommunications to offer postsecondary education and the need to ensure the quality and integrity of this instructional activity. It was supported by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, whose views it does not necessarily reflect.

A series of task forces and advisory committees were responsible for developing the components in the statement. During their deliberations, each group affirmed the need to address the quality of telecommunications instruction within the existing assessment framework, which includes state authorization, non-government voluntary accreditation, and institutional self-regulation. This belief is reinforced in the principles and procedures which follow. The following definition was used during the study:

Telecommunications instruction is any course or series of courses offered or sponsored by a postsecondary education institution, consortium of institutions, or other organization, for which credit is offered or awarded toward a certificate, diploma, or degree. The course or courses must have, as the primary mode of delivery, television, video cassette or disc, film, radio, computer, or other supportive devises which build upon the audio-video format. In many instances, the telecommunications course is supported by textbooks, study guides, library resources, and other study aids, and may also involve personal interaction with faculty, tutors, or other educational personnel by telephone, mail, or in face-to-face meetings.

I. General Principles

A. The assessment of programs delivered by telecommunications should take place within the context of an institution's or other organization's total education mission.
B. The policies and procedures for assessing long distance learning should not discourage the development and use of technology for educational purposes. Specific requirements by state authorizing agencies and accrediting bodies should accommodate constructive innovation.

C. The focus of states' authorization and of non-governmental accreditation activity in long distance learning by telecommunications should be on postsecondary institutions and other organizations which award credit that can be applied toward academic degrees, or which provide other credentials that have credit bearing significance such as programs leading to certification of proficiency or licensure. Authorization and accreditation requirements should not apply to those institutions and organizations which are involved only in the production of courses or support materials.

D. State authorization activities are and should be the initial step and a necessary prerequisite to accreditation in the assessment of long distance learning.

E. The states have a responsibility in consumer protection which should be reinforced as necessary. States without adequate authorization legislation are urged to develop such legislation.

F. Institutions and other organizations involved in telecommunications instruction, as in other instructional activities, should use and further develop rigorous outcome measures to assess program effectiveness. Accrediting bodies and state authorizing agencies should validate and use such measures to the greatest possible extent in their evaluation activities.

G. The focus of the assessment activity for long distance learning by telecommunications conducted by educational institutions should be accreditation, either institutional or professional, as appropriate to the offerings.

H. The interests of higher education and the general public are best served when institutions voluntarily seek appropriate approval even in situations in which they may not be required to do so. Toward this end, the accreditation and authorization of telecommunications-based educational programs should be thorough and reasonable. If this can be accomplished, then the institutional burden of seeking approval will be a reasonable price to pay for increased public confidence.

I. The necessity of an institution's seeking state authorization depends in large measure upon the institution's "physical presence" in the state or states in which it wishes to operate. Although there is yet no clear legal definition of "physical presence," the following guidelines have been developed:

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1. The act of transmitting an electronic signal into another state without any other contact within that state does not, under current laws, constitute physical presence. Similarly, the use of an interstate interactive computer system to deliver educational services - absent any other in-state contact - would not necessarily create jurisdiction over the out-of-state institution.
2. The use of interstate mail and telephone services to provide instructional and related services to students involves protected interstate commerce and, therefore, generally cannot be subjected to state regulation.

3. The presence of an institutional recruiter (agent) in a state may constitute sufficient physical presence of an institution in that state to subject it to licensure. It may also subject the institution to other legal constraints.

4. Support services that include institutional representatives in a state, such as tutors, counselors, or instructors, in most instances establish physical presence sufficient to afford the state jurisdiction through its approval mechanism.

II. Procedures

A. A primary and fundamental objective is the development of close working relations among state authorizing agencies, accrediting bodies, and institutions. They should undertake to reexamine and develop regulations, standards, and criteria for use in the evaluation of instruction delivered by telecommunications. State agencies and accrediting bodies should work together to ensure that state authorization provisions and procedures and accrediting standards complement each other. By undertaking this joint effort, a second objective of reducing the multiple and repetitive procedures currently required for institutions operating in several jurisdictions may be realized. The following procedures are suggested as an initial step toward meeting those objectives:

1. With respect to the states:

a. States should provide mechanisms to exchange information with each other and with accrediting bodies concerning standards, procedures, and actions relating to the authorization of institutions to operate and grant degrees.

b. State authorizing agencies should seek more uniform authorization requirements so that educational institutions eventually can receive authorization in all jurisdictions through common assessment procedures.

c. The states have constitutional and statutory responsibility to provide and supervise education. In those states where statutes providing supervision of postsecondary institutions currently do not exist, appropriate legislation should be sought, and the means for reviewing and authorizing educational operations and institutions should be established. Due consideration should be given to instruction delivered by telecommunications.

d. The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association should continue to work closely with the states to attain these objectives.

2. With respect to regional, national, and specialized accrediting bodies:
a. Accrediting bodies should continue to develop standards and procedures for off-campus programs, including instruction delivered by telecommunications, in harmony with the COPA policy statement on off-campus operations and institutional and accrediting bodies' agreements of understanding.

b. Accrediting bodies, through COPA, should create better mechanisms for the exchange of information with each other and with all affected state agencies concerning standards, procedures, and actions relating to the accreditation of institutions and programs and their off-campus activities, including instruction delivered by telecommunications.

c. Accrediting bodies, as they do now for all other programs, should require institutions involved in long distance learning by telecommunications to have the appropriate authorization to operate in any state in which they wish to offer instruction.

d. Accrediting bodies should require demonstration by an institution or, in the case of specialized accreditation, by the program under evaluation that students achieve the educational objectives set for them. Currently accepted criteria of accreditation can be applied to institutions and programs offering long distance learning or using telecommunications and other electronic techniques. These criteria require, in accordance with accreditation standards, that institutions or programs:

1) Have clearly defined and appropriate educational objectives.

2) Have the resources and structure needed to accomplish these objectives.

3) Demonstrate that these objectives are being accomplished.

4) Give reasons to believe that these objectives will continue to be accomplished.

e. The Council on Postsecondary Accreditation should continue to work closely with accrediting bodies to attain these objectives.

III. Implementation

The following specific procedures are suggested to effect these recommendations:

A. An institution should give to the appropriate state agencies and accrediting bodies advance notice of intent to initiate programs using telecommunications that provide credit applicable toward degrees.

B. To obtain appropriate recognition from state agencies and accrediting bodies, the following strategy is suggested:

1. An institution would provide documentation on the objectives and scope of its programs using telecommunications, including provision for instruction and instructional support. This information would be provided on the "Institutional Profile for Telecommunications Instruction," a document designed to provide state agencies and accrediting bodies with crucial information about telecommunications-based activities.

2. State agencies and accrediting bodies would review the documentation to determine whether the instruction and instructional support meet the established requirements and standards.

3. The documentation would be audited, as appropriate, by state agencies and accrediting bodies and certified as being complete, accurate, and representative of the institution's telecommunications activities. The certified documentation could then be made available to any state agency or accrediting body needing such information.

4. If proper quality and quality controls are evident, approval would be granted by state agencies and accrediting bodies to include the activity within the institution's recognized status.

5. If necessary to reach a sound decision, a state agency or accrediting body might request additional documentation or schedule an on-site visit. The institution, for its part, might withdraw its request without prejudice or appeal any adverse decision to the appropriate body or bodies consistent with due process procedures.

C. Interregional or other agreements envisioning a single accrediting activity for an institution, conducted cooperatively by two or more accrediting bodies, should be fully implemented as they relate to long distance learning so that the accreditation of an institution can be conducted in a single process.

Conclusion

The principles and procedures recommended in this Statement were formulated to ensure the highest quality and integrity of instruction delivered by telecommunications. If adopted by state authorizing agencies and accrediting bodies, there will be a better likelihood of increased cooperation between them, and an important step will have been taken toward instituting common, reasonable, and thorough approval practices.

Adopted by the COPA Board October 11, 1984 **and by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association August 1, 1984** Reviewed by ACCJC 1990, 1996

V. PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR ELECTRONICALLY DELIVERED ACADEMIC DEGREE AND CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

(Adopted June 1996)

This policy, approved by the Commission in June 1996 and developed by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), addresses principles of good practice designed to assure that distance learning is held to the same scrutiny as campus-based instruction. The policy can be found on page 41 of the Handbook.

Recognizing that most institutions must make use of the growing range of systems for delivery of instruction, including various forms of broadcast and other electronic means to serve students at a distance, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges has adopted a set of "Principles of Good Practice" to help assure that distance learning is characterized by the same concerns for quality, integrity, and effectiveness that apply to campus-based instruction. The Principles are not a substitute for the Standards for Accreditation, which apply to all educational activities offered in the name of the institution, regardless of where or how presented, or by whom taught.

Application of the Principles

It is expected that an institution conducting distance learning activities will be able to assure at all times that its distance programs and courses are offered in accord with the principles. An institution seeking to begin distance learning programs for the first time will be asked to demonstrate, as part of the Substantive Change Report, that provisions are in place to assure that the principles will be adhered to. Institutions completing comprehensive self studies will be expected to provide specific evidence that the Principles are followed.

Curriculum and Instruction

Each program of study results in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree or certificate awarded.

An electronically delivered degree or certificate program is coherent and complete.

The program provides for either real-time or delayed interaction between faculty and students and among students.

Qualified faculty provide appropriate oversight of programs delivered electronically.

Institutional Context and Commitment

Role and Mission

The program is consistent with the institution's role and mission.

Review and approval processes ensure the appropriateness of electronic delivery to meeting the program's objectives.

Faculty Support

The institution provides faculty support services specifically related to teaching via electronic delivery.

The program provides training for faculty who teach via electronic delivery.

Resources for Learning

The program ensures that appropriate learning resources are available to students.

Students and Student Services

The program provides students with clear, complete and timely information on the curriculum, course and degree requirements, the nature of faculty/student interaction, assumptions about technological competence and skills, technical equipment requirements, availability of academic support services and financial aid resources, and costs and payment policies.

Enrolled students have reasonable and adequate access to the range of student services appropriate to support their learning and assess their progress.

Accepted students have the background, knowledge, and technical skills needed the undertake the program.

Advertising, recruiting, and admissions materials clearly and accurately represent the program and the services available.

Commitment to Support

Policies for faculty evaluation include appropriate consideration of teaching and scholarly activities related to electronically delivered programs.

The institution demonstrates a commitment to ongoing support, both financial and technical, and to continuation of the program for a period sufficient to enable students to complete a degree/certificate.

Evaluation and Assessment

The institution evaluates the program's educational effectiveness, including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student and faculty satisfaction. Students have access to such program evaluation data.

The institution provides for assessment of student achievement in each course, and at completion of the program.

Background of the Principles Document

These Principles are the product of a Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications project, "Balancing Quality and Access: Reducing State Policy Barriers to Electronically Delivered Higher Education Programs." The three-year project, supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, was designed to foster an interstate environment that encourages the electronic delivery of higher education programs across state lines. The Principles were developed by a group representing the Western states' higher education regulating agencies, higher education institutions, and the regionally accrediting community.

Recognizing that the context for learning in our society is undergoing profound changes, those charged with developing the Principles tried not to tie them to or compare them to campus structures. The Principles were also designed to be sufficiently flexible that institutions offering a range of programs - from graduate degrees to certificates - will find them useful.

Several assumptions form the basis for these Principles:

The electronically delivered program is offered by or through an institution that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting body.

The institution's programs with specialized accreditation meet the same requirements when delivered electronically.

The institution may be a traditional higher education institution, a consortium of such institutions, or another type of organization or entity.

It is the institution's responsibility to review educational programs it provides via technology in terms of its own internally applied definition of these characteristics.

VI. GUIDELINES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

These Guidelines for Distance Education were presented to the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges for adoption at the June 1997 Commission meeting. They were developed in order to facilitate the evaluation of distance education throughout the United States.

This document evolved from the "Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Delivered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs" which was developed by the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications project, and adopted by several of the regional commissions, including the ACCJC in June, 1996. These "guidelines" are probably the middle ground on the evolutionary path between "principles"and "standards."

In order to facilitate the evaluation of distance education throughout the United States, the regional accrediting associations have agreed upon the following definition and guidelines. This agreement is based on an extension of the Principles developed by the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education.

DEFINITION:

Distance education is defined, for the purposes of accreditation review, as a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when student and instructor are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Distance education may employ correspondence study, or audio, video, or computer technologies.

GUIDELINES:

Any institution offering distance education is expected to meet the requirements of its own regional accrediting body and be guided by the WICHE Principles. In addition, an institution is expected to address, in its self-studies and/or proposals for institutional change, the following questions, which they can expect the accrediting commission to review:

Curriculum and Instruction

How do programs provide for timely interaction between students and faculty?

How do programs provide for interaction among students?

How does the institution's faculty assume responsibility for and exercise oversight over distance education, ensuring both the rigor of programs and the quality of instruction?

How does the institution ensure that the technology used is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the programs?

How does the institution ensure the currency of materials, programs, and courses?

How clear are the institution's distance education policies concerning ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the utilization of revenue derived from the creation and production of software, telecourses, or other media products?

What faculty support services specifically related to distance education does the institution provide?

What training for faculty who teach in distance education programs does the institution provide?

Evaluation and Assessment

How does the institution assess student capability to succeed in distance education programs? How is this information applied to admission and recruiting
How does the institution evaluate the educational effectiveness of its distance education programs including assessments of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction to ensure comparability to campus-based programs?

How does the institution ensure the integrity of student work and the credibility of the degrees and credits it awards?

Library and Learning Resources

How does the institution ensure that students have access to and can effectively use appropriate library resources?

How does the institution monitor whether students make appropriate use of learning resources?

How does the institution provide laboratories, facilities, and equipment appropriate to the courses or programs?

Student Services

How does the institution provide adequate access to the range of student services appropriate to support the programs, including admissions, financial aid, academic advising, delivery of course materials, and placement and counseling?

How does the institution provide an adequate means for resolving student complaints?

What advertising, recruiting, and admissions information does the institution provide to students that adequately and accurately represent the programs, requirements, and services available?

How does the institution ensure that students admitted possess the knowledge and equipment necessary to use the technology employed in the program? How does the institution provide aid to students who are experiencing difficulty using the required technology?

Facilities and Finances

What equipment and technical expertise required for distance education does the institution possess?

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How are facilities, staffing, equipment and other resources associated with the viability and effectiveness of the distance education program reflected in the institution's long range planning, budgeting, and policy development processes?

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

While all accreditation standards are germane to the functions of an institution, three of the standards have direct bearing on distance learning issues. **Standard One** requires that the institution have a mission statement that defines its educational purposes, students, and its place in the higher education community. Development of distance learning activities necessitates institutional assessment of their relevance to the college mission.

The provisions of **Standard 3** concentrate on institutional effectiveness by focusing on the processes of institutional research and evaluation, institutional planning, and institutional outcomes assessment. The elements in this standard should inform institutional evaluation of distance learning efforts and provide the structure for their assessment.

Since the elements of **Standard 4** are applicable to all educational activities "regardless of where or how presented, or by whom taught", the standard is presented here in its totality.

III. STANDARD FOUR: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Standard Four deals with all educational programs. While all elements of the standard might apply to a particular program, the following specific sub-standards merit special attention when considering distance learning.

The institution offers collegiate level programs in recognized fields of study that culminate in identified student competencies leading to degrees and certificates. The provisions of this standard are broadly applicable to all educational activities offered in the name of the institution, regardless of where or how presented, or by whom taught.

A. General Provisions

A.1 The institution seeks to meet the varied educational needs of its students through programs consistent with its institutional mission and purposes and the demographics and economics of its community.

A.2 Programs and courses leading to degrees are offered in a manner which provides students the opportunity to complete the program as announced, within a reasonable time.

A.4 The institution provides sufficient human, financial, and physical (including technological) resources to support its educational programs and to facilitate achievement of the goals and objectives of those programs regardless of the service location or instructional delivery method.

A.5 The institution designs and maintains academic advising programs to meet student needs for information and advice and adequately informs and prepares faculty and other personnel responsible for the advising function.

B. Degree and Certificate Programs

B.1 The institution demonstrates that its degrees and programs, wherever and however offered, support the mission of the institution. Degree and certificate programs have a coherent design and are characterized by appropriate length, breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, synthesis of learning, and use of information and learning resources.

B.2 The institution identifies its degrees and certificates in ways which are consistent with the program content, degree objectives, and student mastery of knowledge and skills including, where appropriate, career preparation and competencies.
B.3 The institution identifies and makes public expected learning outcomes for its degree and certificate programs. Students completing programs demonstrate achievement of those stated learning outcomes.

D. Curriculum and Instruction

D.1 The institution has clearly defined processes for establishing and evaluating all of its educational programs.These processes recognize the central role of faculty in developing, implementing, and evaluating the educational programs.Program evaluations are integrated into overall institutional evaluation and planning and are conducted on a regular basis.

D.2 The institution ensures the quality of instruction, academic rigor, and educational effectiveness of all of its courses and programs regardless of service location or instructional delivery method.

D.3 The evaluation of student learning and the award of credit are based upon clearly stated and published criteria. Credit awarded is consistent with student learning and is based upon generally accepted norms or equivalencies.

D.4 The institution has clearly stated transfer of credit policies. In accepting transfer credits to fulfill degree requirements, the institution certifies that the credits accepted, including those for general education, achieve educational objectives comparable to its own courses. Where patterns of transfer between institutions are established, efforts are undertaken to formulate articulation agreements.

D.5 The institution utilizes a range of delivery systems and modes of instruction compatible with the objectives of the curriculum and appropriate to the needs of its students.

D.6 The institution provides evidence that all courses and programs, both credit and non-credit, whether conducted on or off-campus by traditional or non-traditional delivery systems, are

designed, approved, administered, and periodically evaluated under established institutional procedures. This provision applies to continuing and community education, contract and other special programs conducted in the name of the institution.

D.7 Institutions offering curricula through electronic delivery systems operate in conformity with applicable Commission policies and statements on Principles of Good Practice in Distance Education.

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